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The temporal Promises of the Gospel asserted and maintained:

I N A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT THE
ANNIVERSARY MEETING

694.1.22
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OF THE
S O N S O F T H E C L E R G Y,

I N T H E
CATHEDRAL CHURCH of ST. PAUL,
ON THURSDAY, MAY 8, 1788.

B Y T H E
REV. PHIPPS WESTON, B.D. *R*
CANON RESIDENTIARY OF WELLS, AND RECTOR OF WITNEY, OXFORD-
SHIRE.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,
LISTS OF THE NOBILITY, CLERGY, AND GENTRY, WHO HAVE BEEN
STEWARDS FOR THE FEASTS OF THE SONS OF THE CLERGY, TOGETHER
WITH THE NAMES OF THE PREACHERS, AND THE SUMS COLLECTED
AT THE ANNIVERSARY MEETINGS, SINCE THE YEAR 1721.

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The Honourable MR. JUSTICE WILSON.

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(S T E W A R D S

for the LATE FEAST of the SONS of the CLERGY,)

T H I S

D I S C O U R S E,

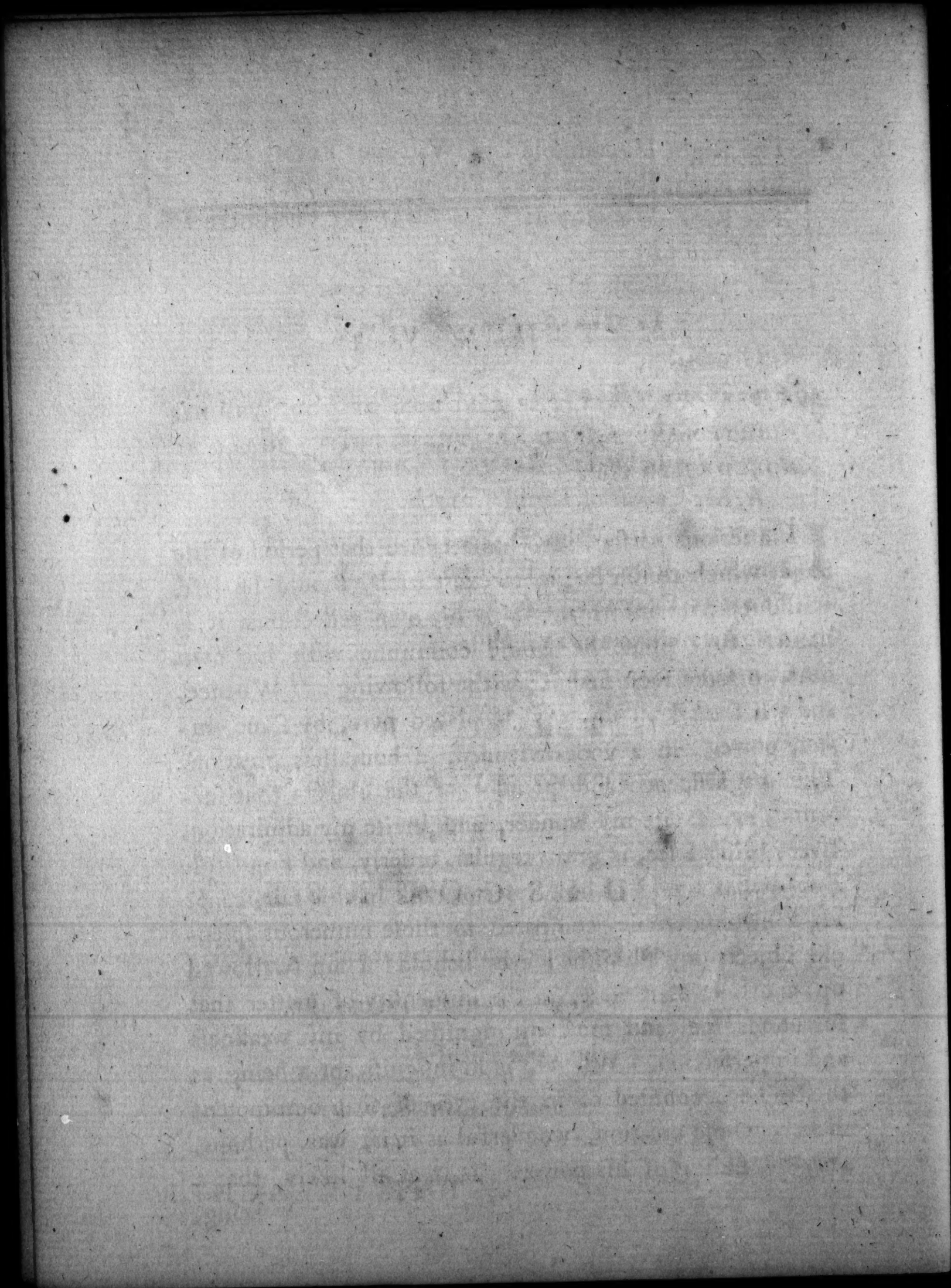
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IS RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

by their faithful

and obedient Servant,

THE PREACHER.



M A T T H E W VI. 33.

BUT SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND HIS
RIGHTEOUSNESS; AND ALL THESE THINGS SHALL BE
ADDED UNTO YOU.

IF a serious person, who has attained that period of life at which reason begins to exert itself, should be left, without better information, to his own reflections, it is natural to suppose he would commune with his own heart in some such manner as the following: "Whence, and what am I? I find myself placed here, by some unseen power, in a wide-extended, a boundless creation. The magnificence and splendor of the objects that surround me, excite my wonder, and invite my admiration. Every thing I see, is great, regular, orderly, and beautiful. But—what am I? of how inferior rank in this fair scene! How inconsiderable, compared to those numerous splendid objects my astonished eyes behold! I am swallowed up, and lost, as it were, in the immensity of matter that surrounds me, and most distinguished by my weakness and imperfection. Wherein is so insignificant a being as this to be accounted of in the eyes of that omnipotent maker, whose creation, wonderful as it is, was, perhaps, only the hiding of his power. Is it at all likely, that a
being,

being, conscious of so many frailties and so much weakness as I am, whose very virtues are but so many blemishes, is of any value in the estimation of the Creator of the Universe? May a not only weak, but sinful creature, as I know myself to be, presume to expect any favourable kindness from a being who must be all-perfect, and pure, and just?"

Some such gloomy thoughts as these would naturally arise in every breast informed by nature alone; the quiet assurance and tranquility of the mind will depend, in a great measure, on the solving of its doubts: and yet, reason, and the philosophy of nature, are unable to solve them.—But the Redeemer of the world has resolved, and has removed them. He has told us *plainly*, what otherwise we never should have known, *of the father, that he loveth us, and careth for us*: nay more, that he loveth us better, and careth for us more than for every thing else in this visible system of creation; in which if it be, as it most certainly is, true, that not one sparrow falleth to the ground, without the permission of our Heavenly Father; it is, he assures us, equally true, that the very hairs of our head are all numbered. And in consequence of this assurance, he has graciously directed us to forbear to entertain any immoderate anxiety about the things of this world; he has admonished us not to be over careful, as that would imply a distrust of his care for us: but to seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, that is, to make it our principal care and study, by faith and obedience, to secure the true riches; and then he

assures us, that all things necessary for our bodily support, shall be added to us.

Had the great governor of the world, after having opened to us a prospect of Heaven, and a glorious immortality, left us to that exceeding great and precious promise, that future hope only, as an armour against all the evils of this transitory state, as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, this had been amply sufficient, and we should have had no just cause to complain, but, on the contrary, all the reason in the world to be thankful. For what shall a man put in competition with the soul, and its eternal welfare? But God, who knoweth whereof we are made, who knoweth that he has given us a body as well as a soul, knoweth also that there are things needful for that body, and that our mixt and compound nature is apt to set a very high value on them; and so tenderly does he love us, that in condescension to this our weakness, he himself has vouchsafed to assure us, that if we will obey his blessed will, and seek him and his righteousness, *first and above all things*, he will add to this our most necessary, and most important acquisition, all that is needful for our bodily subsistence. This *he* hath promised; and hath God said, and shall he not do it? hath he promised, and shall he not bring it to pass? Nay, if that be possible, he hath more than promised it. He has required and intreated us to believe him. He has expostulated with our unkind distrust of him, in a manner so affectionate, and withall so authoritative, as to melt, one would think, the most ob-
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durate heart, and to convince even Scepticism itself. “Why are ye doubtful, O ye of little faith? Consider the lilies of the field; consider the fowls of the air; and be not faithless, but believing.”

Yet some man, perhaps, will ask, what too many have asked, with a sneer, But how are these needful things added? and by what hand are they sent? Do the ravens bring the servants of God bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening? Does the stony rock afford them water? Does their raiment never wax old? and do they never come into plagues and misfortunes like other men?—Such language we have heard even from those who have been divinely supported from their youth up, until now; to whom God has given life and health, and the use of reason and language, which they very graciously employ in arraigning him, and his Providence in the government of the world.

In reply to these captious and querulous suggestions, be it observed, that they proceed on a false supposition; they are founded on what neither the promise of the text, nor any other part of Scripture, implies; namely, that good men shall be furnished with these needful things in a miraculous manner.—Under the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensation, indeed, God did, at sundry times, and in divers manners, interpose visibly, and make bare his arm, for the support of his faithful servants. Jacob, and Moses, and Elijah, were, it is true, often rescued, and protected, and supported, by a miracle wrought

wrought on their behalf. By the same power, avowedly and constantly exerted in their favour, were the Levites of old subsisted and sustained; and afterwards David, and Daniel, and Paul, were preserved by the same miraculous interposition from the paw of the lion, and the bear; the many deaths, which in various shapes, at different times, threatened them.

All this is most undoubtedly true; and it is equally true, that we now see no such visible interference of the Almighty in support of his servants.—But why should it be thought that God's providence is less real, though it be not equally striking, when he effects his purposes, as he does in these our days, by the agency of second causes?

When Christ fed 5000 people in the wilderness, with five barley loaves and two small fishes, every one who partook of that wonderful feast was, no doubt, devoutly thankful; and admired and adored the miracle. Now, he openeth his hand, and by the regular returns of the harvest, filleth all things living with plenteousness—let Reason say if that be a less miracle. Herein lies the difference; in the one case he visibly, and without the covert application, if I may so speak, of second causes, exerts his power; in the other, he disposes and orders a variety of material instruments, with such mechanical powers as naturally to produce the thing he intended to effect.

When St. Paul was ship-wrecked on the island of Melita, Publius the governor, we read, shewed him and his fellow-sufferers much kindness, and gave them such things

as they stood in need of, prompted to relieve their distress by an unseen impulse from that God who had foretold it. And it is the same ever-watchful Providence, that now worketh in the hearts of the good and bountiful: and which lately disposed a noble prelate to reach out a comfortable provision to one, who had before eaten only the bread and drank the water of affliction, who was totally unknown to the giver; and whose distress, in his own idea, I think I may be bold to say, was beyond the reach of human relief. And, to adduce but one instance more, the strongest, perhaps, that has occurred since the age of miracles, it is the same God who rained down manna from Heaven on the Israelites in the wilderness, that now, by you, his servants here assembled, showers down his blessings on the widows and orphans of those shepherds, who were employed in conducting his people through another wilderness: all is alike the Lord's doing; and ought to be equally marvellous in our eyes.

The difference is only this:—under the Gospel-dispensation he setteth one thing against another; the rich and the poor meet together; they meet, and fit like indentures, where the redundancy fills the vacancy: the Lord is the maker of them both; not only their maker as they are men, but as they are rich and poor; the better to effect the wise and hidden purposes of his providence.

Impulse and attraction do not more fitly consist and conspire to carry on the revolution of the earth, and the heavenly bodies in the natural, than poverty and riches combine to bring about that revolution of events, by
which

which God's will is accomplished in the moral system. It is the same almighty power, by which waters flow from their fountain, and light from the sun, by which all material nature acts according to God's original design, that prepareth the hearts of the humane and charitable to commiserate the helpless orphan, and to wipe away the tear from the widow's cheek. Our supplemental bounty is admitted into his system, that he may be enabled to reward us the more for it. God sets bounds to his goodness, only to give us opportunity of exerting ours: and that we may feel the pleasure of that truth, "that it is more blessed to give than to receive."

The popular objection, therefore, to a particular providence, founded on the unequal distribution of the good things, as they are usually called, of this life, which to a hasty and incurious observer may seem to form the strongest argument against it, is, in reality, when duly considered, the fullest proof of it that can be advanced or offered.—Allow, that the governor of the world does scatter his favours promiscuously, and that though he professes himself the patron of virtue and religion, yet it is often seen, that no two things stand more widely from each other in this present state, than the practice of virtue, and the reward of it. Allow all that specious declamation has said, or can say on this subject, from the days of Job, the earliest writer we know of, down to the present times; and without having recourse to the end of these men, wherein it will certainly appear that God has been a righteous judge, as well as strong and patient: without considering, which yet should be attentively con-

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sidered; that death does not remove us out of God's empire, but that he can in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, change the garments rolled in blood, into robes of glory; I say, allow it all, and it will all only turn to the praise of God; it will turn out to be a confirmation of that truth it is brought to disprove. For what is God? a moral governor. What is Man? a moral agent. Now in a world consisting of beings constituted as men are, without hardships, where is trial? and without trial, where is virtue? and without virtue, where is reward? Wealth and ease, and faring sumptuously, may be pleasure; but poverty, and patience, and resignation, this is virtue; and yet this virtue can be called into existence only by hardship and distress. These beautiful colourings of a heavenly mind, like those of the rainbow, are seen only in clouds.

Thus we see that the necessary inequalities in God's government of the world is so far from affording an objection to the existence of his providence, that it only contributes to establish the belief of it: we see too, that this present world is so constituted as to be, what we should naturally expect to find it, a school for all the virtues: and, therefore, that thus it behoveth accountable and rewardable beings, such as we are, to suffer first, and then to enter into our glory. If to this we add, that thereby is given to the wealthy the glorious opportunity of exercising that virtue, which is the great ornament of his nature, and for which his wealth was probably entrusted to him, we shall see this objection entirely vanish, and that he, who once out of weakness, out of the mouth of babes

babes and sucklings ordained strength, doth now, out of the mouth of objectors to his providence, perfect praise.

It is not then material to the argument under consideration, if indeed the point will admit of an argument, whether the promise of the text will be fulfilled in a natural, or supernatural way. If a man eats, and drinks, and is clothed, the promise of God is fulfilled. And that it has constantly been fulfilled, and is now fulfilling, witness those splendid edifices in this metropolis, in which ample provision is made for almost every species of misery and distress. Walk about this our Sion, and go round about her, and, I do not say tell the towers thereof, but count the many spacious buildings erected to charitable uses; and you will readily admit, that he who hath worked hitherto, still worketh in and by some, for the preservation of all his reasonable creatures. Witness the recent establishment of Sunday Schools, a work certainly of God! for which the tongues of infants shall lisp our praise, and generations yet unborn applaud and celebrate the present.

But need I carry your view beyond this august temple in which we are now assembled, and this day's celebrity; on which occasion we may fitly and justly exclaim, This day this Scripture is fulfilled in our ears.

The promise of the Redeemer, indeed, extends only to things needful; but the completion of that does not always limit his bounty. To many he gives the conveniences, and elegancies, as well as the necessaries of life. The gracious master, whom we serve, is daily pouring
his

his benefits, his uncovenanted benefits, upon us. We, who are now alive at this day, have seen many elevated to the first stations in church and state, while they have been literally seeking the kingdom of God and his righteousness. But if it were not so, be it known unto these cavilers and objectors, that we are not careful to answer them in this matter. The minister of the gospel enters into the service of his heavenly master with other and higher views; he serves him on the nobler principle of love. He knows full well that the performance of this promise of God does not extend to the warding off the evils of humanity; nor is he fondly led to think that they who preach the cross, shall never bear it on themselves. He has not so learned Christ. He knows whom he serves, and whom he has believed. His mind thus framed, he is persuaded that godliness is sufficient riches; and though he may happen to have nothing, he has the secret of possessing, or at least of enjoying, all things.

Let us, then, at least as many as wish to be perfect, be thus minded; let us remember his history who vowed a vow, that if God would be with him in the way that he should go, and give him food to eat, and raiment to put on, then should the Lord be his God. And let the remembrance of his history, let the universal experience of all ages, let the promises of God, serve to support and comfort the aged preacher of righteousness, in his poverty, while he lieth sick upon his bed: let it remove the doubts, and strengthen the faith, of his now departing soul; for though he die, God liveth; and in him his

feed will find a sure and never failing succour and support—by you the glorious instruments of his providence.

Proceed, then, fellow-labourers, together with God, proceed in this work of love; go on from strength to strength, and the Lord prosper you: we wish you good luck in the name of the Lord. Go on, assured that this is his peculiar work; for God loveth the gates of Sion, more than all the dwellings of Jacob: and though many excellent things have been fairly spoken of other species of charity, of this I think it may be truly said, thou excellest them all.—Nor are they, whose cause I now plead, unworthy for whom you should do this: they are the children and widows of those, who having served God in their generation, are now fallen asleep; they are a race, who have no arm to oppose to poverty but that of patience; no shield to combat with but that of faith. And what makes their case still more pitiable, they are the descendants and relatives of those who were prevented and restricted by decency, by a regard to their character, nay, by the laws of their country, from mixing with secular affairs, and thus laying up in store for the future provision of their families.

Men, brethren and fathers, let me freely, and without the hazard of danger as to invidious construction, speak to you of the merits of the Clergy of the Church of England. To what order of men do you, does the whole English nation, owe the greatest and most distinguishing blessings it now enjoys? To whom, under God, are you indebted

indebted for the original introduction of Christianity into this island? let history answer, and it will say, a priest. To whose skill and industry do you owe the translation of the Scriptures from their original, into your mother-tongue? a labour truly astonishing! a work of the first consequence to the present and eternal interests of millions! Truth must answer, to the English clergy. To whom is this nation indebted for the Reformation, and all that glorious spiritual liberty, its consequent, which we now more than enjoy,—which we riot in? By whose munificence were the many noble and useful foundations and seminaries for the support of religion and learning, in our two universities, and elsewhere in this kingdom, instituted and erected? Truth must confess, chiefly to the English clergy. To whom did we owe the well-tempered opposition to arbitrary power, and the security of our present happy constitution? Let history answer, and she will say, the English Clergy had their share in it. To whom, in the beginning of this century, did a neighbouring kingdom owe its safety and preservation, when threatened with a famine, that seemed to baffle all human power of relief? History will tell us, to a clergyman, and that clergyman, a bishop; no mean proof, surely, that riches are not always, as some would have us think, ill placed in ecclesiastical hands!

When I venture to plead the merits of our order, I would be understood to mean only their merits relative to society. God forbid that any man should glory on his own, or on any created being's account before HIM, who

who chargeth his very angels with folly; who looketh to the moon, and it shineth not; and the stars are not pure in his sight.—No; before HIM we desire to shrink into nothing; before HIM we desire, if I might be allowed the expression, to annihilate ourselves. Before HIM we presume not to talk of merit, well knowing, that without the imputation of his merits, the very best of us are not so much as intitled to mercy.

But if it should be deemed improper to speak more largely of the merits, permit me at least to speak largely and feelingly of the hardships, the misery, and the distress of too many of the English clergy. Shut not your merciful ears to that representation, which stands too confessed to be controverted or denied. And here, in this place, let me speak especially of the distress of their widows and children*.—Bereft of their only support, by the loss of him, from whom they derived their all; banished from that roof under which they dwelt securely, into a wide and wicked world, with no protection, perhaps, but that of innocence, how uncommonly hard is their lot; how singularly pitiable their fate! Should they have been tempted in the bitterness of their souls, to cry out, “God hath forgotten us, he hideth away his face, and will never look upon us;” it is at least the language of nature. But grace speaketh better things; God says,

* I cannot here omit the opportunity that offers of recommending to the humane and opulent, a recently established charity for the “Maintenance and Education of poor Orphans of the Clergy, till of age to be put apprentice.”

forbear complaining, O thou of little faith; I have not forgotten thee; I have surely seen it;"—for he regardeth the distress of all his servants—Stand still, then, and consider the wonderful works of God; how gracious he is in his dealings towards the children of men. The same providence which inflicted the loss, furnishes the remedy; God becomes a father of the fatherless, and defendeth the cause of the widow. By you, his almoners, he sends them relief as really, though not so apparently, as he fed Elijah by the ravens in the desert; so that we may securely and triumphantly with the Psalmist exclaim, "I have been young, and now am old; and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread."

God is not unrighteous, that he should forget your works and labour of love, which love ye have shewed for his name's sake, who have ministered unto the saints, and yet do minister. God unrighteous! no; God forbid! and yet, you see, he admits by his apostle, that he should be so, were he to forget these your services. No; he not only never will forget them, but what is more, he will interpret them, as done unto himself. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto these, my brethren, ye have done it to me."

Under the full sense, and invigorating influence of this truth, let him that hath much give plenteously; and let him that hath little do his diligence gladly to give of that little.—So shall we, every one of us, lay up a good foundation against that great and terrible day, when every one's work shall be tried by fire: when he who hath delivered

the poor and needy, shall himself be delivered from the wrath to come, by the God of all mercy, who delights in acts of mercy; who himself is mercy; and who to the merciful man, at that awful hour when he will most stand in need of it, will extend his mercy, which, as we shall all most certainly want, so God grant that we may all diligently strive to obtain; through the merits of Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all honour and glory, in this world, and that which is to come.

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